

5. Billy feels it's obscene to talk about Shroom's death...and he wonders by what process any discussion about the war seems to profane these ultimate matters of life and death (p. 137). Is it possible for any noncombatant to understand the depth of Billy's grief? Is it "profane" to talk about Shroom...or is there a way, as an outsider, to talk about war and death without cheapening it? Billy thinks there ought to be a special language to do so. Do we have such a language?

6. Follow up to Question 5: The book seems to take aim at civilians who talk to the Bravo team: their questions, comments, and references to patriotism, 9/11, terrorism, God, and war are over-the-top—their words are even presented in a vertical-diagonal format. But much of the outpouring of gratitude seems genuine, even if inane. How does a civilian talk to a combatant, someone who faces the constant threat of death and witnesses violence on a scale unimaginable to most of us? What can any of us say? What have you ever said to a returning soldier?

7. The book abounds with parallels between the world of football, especially the Cowboys, and the military. Talk about how those similarities evidence themselves throughout the book? What is the author trying to get at by setting up comparisons between the two?

8. Albert tells Bravo that they are true heroes for the twenty-first century. He says that their heroism "has really touched a nerve in this country" (p. 56). What "nerve" has been struck...why is the public so enamored with the young men? Why the deluge of attention and adulation? What is it based on?

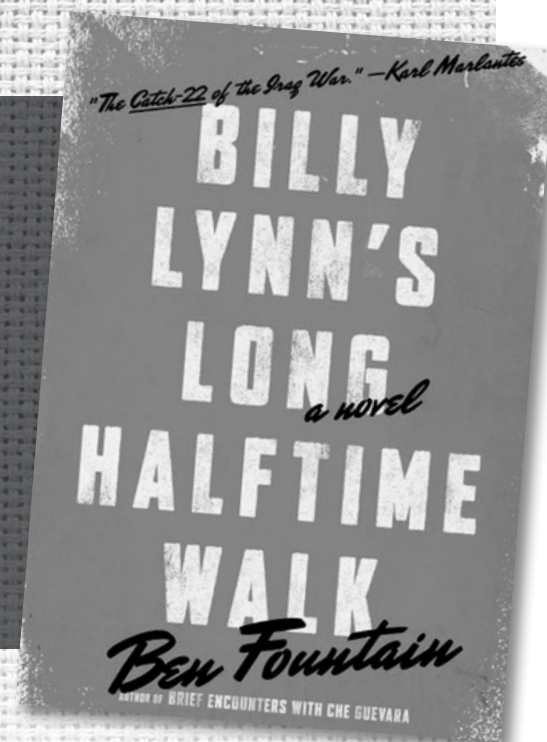
9. Follow-up to Question 8: Billy, on the hand, pities the Americans and their frenzy to connect with Bravo. He refers to them as children (pp. 45-46). Why is he so disproving of his fellow Americans? Do you consider Billy cynical? Or does he realize something about the nature of his fellow citizens? If so, what does he see in them...in us?

10. Follow-up to Question 9: Billy thinks that Americans have no conception of the "state of pure sin toward which war inclines" (p. 46). What does he mean? How does war incline to sin if one is fighting for one's country?

Discussion Questions

"Witty and ironic sendup of middle America, Fox News politics, and, of all things, football."

— *Publisher's Weekly*



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Ben Fountain is an American fiction writer, whose 2012 novel, *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*, was selected as a finalist for the 2012 National Book Award.

He is the author of *Brief Encounters With Che Guevara*, a collection of short stories. He has won numerous awards, including the Texas Institute of Letters Short Story Award for 2002 and 2004, a Pushcart Prize in 2004, an O. Henry Award in 2005 and 2007, and inclusion of his work in *New Stories from the South: The Year's Best 2006*. In 2007 he won the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for a distinguished first book

of fiction, and a Whiting Writers Award, a prestigious award for emerging writers, from the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation.

Fountain earned a B.A. in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1980, and a law degree from the Duke University School of Law in 1984. After a brief stint practicing real estate law at Akin Gump in Dallas, Fountain in 1988 quit the law to become a full time fiction writer. He lives in Dallas, Texas.

Book Summary

A ferocious firefight with Iraqi insurgents at “the battle of Al-Ansakar Canal”—three minutes and forty-three seconds of intense warfare caught on tape by an embedded Fox News crew—has transformed the eight surviving men of Bravo Squad into America’s most sought-after heroes.

For the past two weeks, the Bush administration has sent them on a media-intensive nationwide “Victory Tour” to reinvigorate public support for the war. Now, on this chilly and rainy Thanksgiving, the Bravos are guests of America’s Team, the Dallas Cowboys, slated to be part of the halftime show alongside the superstar pop group Destiny’s Child.

Among the Bravos is the Silver Star-winning hero of Al-Ansakar Canal, Specialist William Lynn, a nineteen-year-old Texas native. Amid clamoring patriots sporting flag pins on their lapels and Support Our Troops bumper

stickers on their cars, the Bravos are thrust into the company of the Cowboys’ hard-nosed businessman/owner and his coterie of wealthy colleagues; a luscious born-again Cowboys cheerleader; a veteran Hollywood producer; and supersized pro players eager for a vicarious taste of war. Among these faces Billy sees those of his family—his worried sisters and broken father—and Shroom, the philosophical sergeant who opened Billy’s mind and died in his arms at Al-Ansakar.

Over the course of this day, Billy will begin to understand difficult truths about himself, his country, his struggling family, and his brothers-in-arms—soldiers both dead and alive. In the final few hours before returning to Iraq, Billy will drink and brawl, yearn for home and mourn those missing, face a heart-wrenching decision, and discover pure love and a bitter wisdom far beyond his years.

Poignant, riotously funny, and exquisitely heartbreaking, *Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk* is a devastating portrait of our time, a searing and powerful novel that cements Ben Fountain’s reputation as one of the finest writers of his generation.

Discussion Questions

1. Do the young men from Bravo meet your expectations of what war heroes are...or should be? Given their behavior—drinking, trash-talk, hypersexuality, and brawling—are they what you think of when the word “hero” comes to mind? Do you find Ben Fountain’s portrayal of them funny ... offensive ... realistic...?
2. Talk about the individual members of Bravo, especially Billy and Dime—what do you think of them? What other member of the team stood out as you read the novel?
3. What kind of character is Albert? Most books and films are scathing in their portrayal of Hollywood and its values. How does Albert, a three-time Oscar winner, stack up to the stereotypical Hollywood producer—what do you make of him?
4. Talk about the other characters—in particular Billy’s family and, of course, Norman Oglesby.